Joy Comes in the Morning

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Contents

Part 1: God's Rulebook Joy.....5

Part 2: Prehended Not Pretended Joy.....27

"... Weeping may
endure for a night,
but joy cometh in
the morning"
(Psalm 30:5).

Part 1: God's Rulebook Joy

On June 6, 1981, Doug Whitt and his bride, Sylvia, were escorted to their hotel's fancy bridal suite in the wee small hours of the morning.

In the room they saw a sofa, chairs, and table, but where was the bed? Then they discovered the sofa was a hide-a-bed, with a lumpy mattress and sagging springs.

They spent a fitful night and woke up in the morning with sore backs.

The new husband went to the hotel desk and gave the management a tongue-lashing.

"I believe that you sought your joy in the wrong place." said the clerk, and then he asked, "Did you open the door in the room?"

Doug went back to the room. He opened the door to what they had thought was a wardrobe. There, complete with fruit baskets and chocolates, was a beautifully decorated bedroom.

People have pursued joy in every avenue imaginable.

Some have successfully found it while others have not.

Perhaps it would be easier to describe where joy cannot be found:

Joy cannot be found in Unbelief —

Voltaire was an infidel of the most pronounced type. He wrote: "I wish I had never been born."

Joy cannot be found in Pleasure —

Lord Byron lived a life of pleasure if anyone did. He wrote: "The worm, the canker, and grief are mine alone."

Joy cannot be found in Money —

Jay Gould, the American millionaire, had plenty of that. When dying, he said: "I suppose I am the most miserable man on earth."

Joy cannot be found in Position and Fame —

Lord Beaconsfield enjoyed more than his share

of both. He wrote: "Youth is a mistake; manhood a struggle; old age a regret."

Joy cannot be found in Military Glory —

Alexander the Great conquered the known world in his day. Having done so, he wept in his tent, lamenting, "There are no more worlds to conquer."

Marie Ebner-Eschenbach, it seems, confused joy with happiness, when she wrote, "How happy are the pessimists! What joy is theirs when they have proved there is no joy?"

Samuel Dickey Gordon tells us that, "Joy is distinctly a Christian word and a Christian thing. It is the reverse of happiness. Happiness is the result of what happens of an agreeable sort. Joy has its springs deep down inside. And that spring never runs dry, no matter what happens".

Tim Hansel wrote, "Happiness is a feeling. Joy is an attitude. A posture. A position. A place".

Kirby Page insists that, "The word joy is too great and grand to be confused with the superficial things we call happiness".

D L Moody preached, "Happiness is caused by things that happen around me, and circumstances will mar it; but joy flows right on through trouble; joy flows on through the dark; joy flows in the night as well as in the day; joy flows all through persecution and opposition."

"It is an unceasing fountain bubbling up in the heart; a secret spring the world can't see and doesn't know anything about".

Where then is real joy found? How can a Christian have joy, not only in everyday life, but also in difficult times?

In 1882, George Matheson wrote, "O Joy that seekest me through pain, I cannot close my heart to thee; I trace the rainbow thru~ the rain, and feel the promise is not vain, that morn shall tearless be."

Moody elsewhere said: "The Lord gives his people perpetual joy when they walk in obedience to him".

S D Gordon says that, "Only Jesus gives that joy. He had joy, singing its music within, even under the shadow of the cross.

Philippians 4:2 and 3 says, "I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. And I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life."

Here we have two good Christians who simply disagree with each other and Paul wants them to stop the fight.

Verses 4 and 5, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."

There a connection between the dispute and Paul's statement in Philippians 4 about rejoicing, because a person actually be in a dispute and still rejoice.

Some people have an evil attitude that enjoys conflict or a mental health condition such as masochism or sadism, but normal people do not like to be in a dispute. So something different is going on here.

Paul's direction is to rejoice 'in the Lord'. When our joy depends on humans, we have the problem of

changes in their mood. When our joy comes from God, we have an unchanging Father who continually loves and cares for us. These two women had a common reason to rejoice - their relationship with God. So do we.

Billy Sunday wrote, "If you have no joy in your religion, there's a leak in your Christianity somewhere."

Let's look at an example from the Gospels.

Luke 15:3-6, "And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost."

The shepherd is calling for a party because a sorrow shared halves the sorrow, while a joy shared doubles the joy.

Verse 7, "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than

over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance".

Pastor Raleigh Washington wrote, "If the angels in heaven rejoice and shout when a person gives his life to Christ, why should we be denied the same joy?"

A rhetorical question for you to contemplate: If you were the lost sheep, how would you feel about being found?

If we compare the happiness of the sheep with the happiness of the shepherd we can see who should be happier. The shepherd has 99 other sheep. For him, that lost sheep is one percent of his concern. For the sheep itself, its own welfare is 100% of its concern. The sheep should be one hundred times happier than the shepherd.

If we allow that thought to play into our joy in the Lord, then the mere fact that God saved us from eternal death and forgave our ugly sins should be a source for 100% joy.

Let's look at this from another angle. We've looked at Luke 15, let's look at John 15.

John 15:9 -10, "As the Father hath loved me, so

have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love".

If we disobey God, He does not stop loving us.

US Presbyterian Minister Roger Paine wrote regarding these verses, "One of the [Bible] writers, a man named Paul, wrote that there is only one way to get to heaven, that if you don't believe exactly what [Paul] believed, God will stop loving you; God is still trying to figure out where Paul got that idea, but God knows it didn't come from him."

Actually, I'm trying to figure where the Rev. Paine got that idea about Paul, love and about God.

If we say that God always loves us regardless of our actions, what does God mean when He says 'If' you obey, you will abide in my love (the NIV says 'remain in my love')? On the surface, that sounds conditional.

If I add to that Matthew 7:21 which says, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven".

That too, on the surface, sounds like obedience is the key, not only to God's love, but the key to the kingdom of heaven.

Pause to think what says about rejoicing in Psalm 19:8.

Psalm 19:8, "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes".

Note the phrase, "Rejoicing the heart". For the sincere Christian, God's statutes or precepts (His rules) are not likely to give joy to us when we disobey them.

God gives us His love unconditionally and freely offers us His Joy. However we can only benefit from that joy, and truly appreciate God's love, when we are obedient.

John 15 verses 10 and 11. "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full".

There is a difference between the absolute unconditional fact that God loves us and our abiding,

remaining or living in that love.

God takes joy in our obedience to Him. And we have can complete joy in obedience.

Now you may be wondering what it is about obedience that gives us joy.

Psalm 19:8, "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes."

The Bible is not so much a book about rewards for obedience, as it is a book revealing the secret laws of the universe. When Psalm 19:8 refers to "enlightening (or giving light to) the eyes," it means we see something about the way the universe operates that we did not see before.

God loves us even when we are sinners. Romans 5:8, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

But, in His great love, God has revealed to us the rules for better living. If we obey those rules we benefit from God's wisdom. Living better gives us joy. If we stray from the rules we suffer and that takes away our joy.

Martha Vancise from Fort Pierce in Florida wrote about her family's concept of the relationship between obedience and heaven.

She said that, during a thunderstorm in the Midwest, her parents turned on the TV to watch for tornado warnings.

Just as the screen flashed a warning, a tree limb crashed outside the living room window.

Her mother rushed toward a safer spot in the dining room, but a terrific lightning strike stopped her in the doorway.

Wringing her hands, she shouted to her husband above the storm, "Where are we going?"

"I guess," he said calmly, "it depends on how we've lived."

Let's continue reading what Jesus says about the relationship between obedience and heaven.

Matthew 7:21-23 is a portion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 7:21-23, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which

is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity".

It sounds like the people who are lost have also done many wonderful works. If how we've lived through obedience and works are not the key to the kingdom of heaven, what is?

Let's continue with Jesus' sermon by reading verses 24-27.

Matthew 7:24-27, "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock."

"And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it".

The relationship between obedience and better living is another example of the joyful rulebook theory.

If works could save us, those who performed miracles and drove out demons should have been saved.

Instead, the person who survived and thrived was the one who understood the principle of building on a proper foundation. The person who knew that secret, and used that knowledge, was able to withstand the storms of life.

A converted cowboy put it this way, "Lots of folks that would really like to do right, think that serving the Lord means shouting themselves hoarse praising His name."

"Now I'll tell you how I look at that. I am working for Jim here. Now if I would do nothing but sit around the house telling what a good fellow Jim is and singing songs to him, I would not suit Jim. But when I buckle on my straps and hustle among the hills and see that Jim's herd is all right, not suffering for water and feed, or being driven off the range and branded by cow thieves, then I am serving Jim as he wants to be served."

Jesus mentions joy several times in John 16. By

way of introduction, let's look at verses 16-18.

John 16:16-18, 'A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? We cannot tell what he saith'.

Do we understand what Jesus' disciples did not understand? Jesus was going to leave them, but that He would come back to see them after His crucifixion.

As I said, Jesus mentions joy several times in John 16. As we consider the context, ask yourself what could be a source of joy for you today?

John 16:19-24, "Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy."

"A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world."

"And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full".

Just as the disciples would have joy in Jesus' resurrection, so we can have joy in the fact that Jesus has overcome sin on our behalf.

John 16:33, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world".

Earlier I suggested that obedience to God's joyful rulebook gives us a better life. Only at first glance does this text suggest that I am wrong. The disciples were heading for unavoidable trouble and we will have trouble in our life at some time or other (or both).

Following God's rules is often the very thing to help to keep us out of unnecessary trouble. However, when we do get into trouble, the knowledge that Jesus has defeated sin becomes our source of both joy and hope.

The author of the hymn 'Amazing Grace', John Newton, credited his wife with being the inspiration that enabled him to leave the slave trading in Africa and find salvation in Jesus Christ. They were married for forty years.

When she died Newton preached on the text from Habakkuk 3:17: "Though the fig tree does not bud, and there are no grapes on the vines ... yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour."

Calvin Miller wrote, "God ... does not lavish his children with a jolly discipleship so that they may swim in spiritual ecstasy between conversion and death. God is a giver, but he does not give happiness. He gives redemption, meaning, security, love, victory, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And happiness is our response to his gifts".

Let's spend a few moments looking at the relationship of the Holy Spirit to joy. Joy is one of the

fruit of the Spirit as recorded in Galatians 5, starting at verse 22.

Galatians 5:22-25, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit".

Because the sinful nature is opposed to joy, that is the sinful passions and desires are contrary to a Spirit led life and lead to trouble, we experience joy in the Holy Spirit when He enables us to be released from sinful passions and desires.

For example, in Acts 2:28 we read, "Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance". The NIV reads, "You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence".

We have a reference here to God's joyful rulebook of life, but we also are told that God's presence brings us joy. We can come into the presence of God because the Holy Spirit, God's spirit, can be everywhere. This is what allows us to live in the

presence of God.

This text was quoting David in Psalm 16:11 and links God's presence and knowing, with following "the paths of life", another name for God's joyful rulebook.

Acts 8:6-8, "And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city".

Philip healed through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The power of the Spirit to help us with the problems of life brings joy, and this joy is connected with the presence of God.

Again from the Book of Acts, this time Chapter 13.

Acts 13:49-52, "And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul

and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost".

If I forcefully asked you to leave your church or home, I doubt that you would be very joyful about it? The text says the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Normally, we do not take joy in rejection. However, the presence of God reassured the disciples that they were doing the right thing. And that is what gave them joy.

Would you like more joy in your life? I'm sure you would. We can increase our joy by asking the Holy Spirit to come into our life and lead our thoughts and actions into obedience to God.

Pastor Joel Gregory said, "It's an unusual thing that in history many who have the least to thank God about, thank him the most".

In 1636 during the Thirty Years War (one of the worst wars in the history of mankind in terms of the sheer number of deaths, epidemics and economic

results) there was a godly pastor whose name was Martin Rinkert.

In that single year, 1636, Martin Rinkert conducted funerals for 5,000 people in his parish, about fifteen a day. He lived with the worst that life could do.

But in the middle of that time, he wrote a table grace for his children, a song of thanksgiving. I preach at many churches throughout the year, however if I'd spent the year holding 5,000 funerals of the people in my congregations, could I write for my children a song of thanksgiving?

Here's what Rinkert wrote:

Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices, who wondrous things has done, in whom this world rejoices; who from our mothers' arms has blessed us on our way with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us, with ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us; and keep us still in grace, and guide us when perplexed; and free us from all ills, in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given; the Son, and him who reigns with them in highest heaven; the one eternal God, whom earth and heaven adore; for thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.

"...Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

"When the
morning stars sang
together ... all the
sons of God
shouted for joy"
(Job 38:7).

Part 2: Prehended Not Pretended Joy

During my college days in Cooranbong, New South Wales, I was helping out an elderly lady at Dora Creek tidying up her yard. At the close of the day, I went to the rubbish tip to dispose of some rusty old roofing iron. As I backed up our car to the tip site I got two punctured tyres at once.

Have you ever noticed that sometimes trouble comes in batches? Life can go on smoothly for a while and then all of sudden things go wrong - not just one thing, but several things at once. And you wonder what hit you.

I had changed one wheel with my only spare and was stretching my back when I spied a discarded car wheel on top of a pile of rubbish. I checked it out: it was the right size, had plenty of tread and was fully inflated. So I believe that the Good Lord helped me out of what could have been an awkward predicament.

A flat tyre is really no big deal. Having two at the same time was a real annoyance at the time, but nothing more. But what if those flat tyres were real

crises and all of a sudden two or three of them came all at once in life?

In a Peanuts cartoon, Artist Charles Schulz has Charlie Brown saying, "It always looks darkest just before it gets totally black!"

Things don't always go as planned. The truth is, no one sails through life without storms.

Trouble is something we all have to deal with.

A military chaplain had a sign on his door. It said, "If you have troubles, come and tell me about them. If you don't have troubles, come in and tell me how you do it!"

All trouble comes from violated laws. Sometimes it can happen that the trouble which descends upon us does not come from our personal violation of law, but it does come from some type of law violation somewhere else. Scripture says: "the curse causeless shall not come' (Proverbs 26:2).

1 Peter 1:6, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations"

The New Living Translation says, "So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while."

I want you to notice the phrase "ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations" or "you have to endure many trials." What kind of hardship was Peter talking about?

Peter is writing to believers who were going through very hard times. And those hard times were caused in large part because they were Christians.

Peter is writing from Rome probably only a few months before the emperor Nero burned Rome to the ground and blamed the Christians. Paul was martyred during the aftermath of Rome's burning.

Followers of Jesus already were beginning to be singled out for persecution. Persecution was not universal and it was not that every Christian got thrown to the lions. But some were, and at increasing frequency.

Christians were harassed. You could think of this period as resembling Nazi Germany of the 1930s. Jews were being ostracized. Their businesses began to be boycotted and vandalized with impunity. And there was

something ominous in the air about terrible things to come.

Such were the times at which Peter was writing.

But it really doesn't matter what kinds of trials make life tough. No matter where our tough times come from, Peter's message offers insights to all who are facing hardship.

I mean, what do you do when you are faced with cancer? How do you respond when your spouse walks out on you after he or she has betrayed you for so long?

How do you handle the reversal of nature and you go through the excruciating time of losing a child?

How do you deal with a habit that is messing up your life, but you can't break its grip on your life?

And so, when Peter begins his letter he does not express how sorry he is that life can be so hard for them. Instead, he gives praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then he adds, "So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while."

Notice how Peter talks about being truly glad and about wonderful joy in the midst of serious hardship!

And so, the questions I want Scripture to answer is, "What reasons does Peter give to back up such gladness and joy?" "How can Christ's followers find cause for joy when times are tough?"

Firstly let's define joy. This part of *"Joy in the Morning"* is titled, "Prehended Not Pretended Joy". Prehend means to seize or grasp - in this case to seize or grasp joy.

Prehend is the root for words such as comprehend, prehensile and apprehend. Pretend means to feign or imagine joy. Many people have to pretend joy because they equate it with happiness.

The 92-year-old, petite, well-poised lady, who is fully dressed each morning by eight o'clock, with her hair fashionably coifed and makeup perfectly applied, even though she is legally blind, moved to a nursing home today. Her husband of 70 years recently passed away, making the move necessary.

Maurine Jones is the most lovely, gracious,

dignified woman that you would ever have the pleasure of meeting.

After many hours of waiting patiently in the lobby of the nursing home, she smiled sweetly when told her room was ready. As she manoeuvred her walker to the elevator, an aide provided a visual description of her tiny room, including the eyelet sheets that had been hung on her window.

"I love it," she stated with the enthusiasm of an eight-year-old having just been presented with a new puppy.

"Mrs. Jones, you haven't seen the room...just wait."

"That doesn't have anything to do with it," she replied. "Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not doesn't depend on how the furniture is arranged...it's how I arrange my mind. I already decided to love it..."

She went on to say, "It's a decision I make every morning when I wake up. I have a choice; I can spend the day in bed recounting the difficulty I have with the parts of my body that no longer work, or get out of bed

and be thankful for the ones that do. Each day is a gift, and as long as my eyes open, I'll focus on the new day and all the happy memories I've stored away...just for this time in my life. Old age is like a bank account...you withdraw from what you've put in...So, my advice to you would be to deposit a lot of joy in the bank account of memories, so when you go over it a second time, you can enjoy it again."

From 1 Peter 1:1-9, I want us to notice five insights for joy beyond tough times.

1 Peter 1:1-9, " Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,
2) Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.
3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
4) To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,
5) Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

6) Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:
7) That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:
8) Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:
9) Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."

The first insight to capture joy in tough times, is that God reminds me I am only passing through.

Peter writes to encourage you and me. And his encouragement is based on the premise that we are only passing through.

There is a song that says "This world is not my home". When I researched its authorship I found that it has been attributed to at least seventeen different writers, each with their own fanciful stories of its genesis.

Nevertheless the message is clear, *"This world*

is not my home, I'm just a-passing through. My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from Heaven's open door and I can't feel at home in this world anymore."

Verse 1 of 1 Peter 1 is addressed to "the scattered strangers". When the heat is on, we need to have an extended view of life.

Dr. Archibald Hart shared a story with me about Dr. Richard Mouw, one-time President of Fuller Theological Seminary. Dr Mouw had been an ordained minister and a noted Reformed-evangelical speaker.

When Dr. Mouw arrived for the first time in his new office as the president of the seminary, he felt pretty good about himself having arrived as president of the largest evangelical seminary in North America.

Then he noticed a stack of mail on his desk. He picked it up and noticed that the very first letter was addressed to "Resident." And he thought, that's wrong, it should be President, not Resident!

And then in a moment of humility he caught himself and Dr. Mouw said, No, it is not supposed to be President, but Resident. I am just passing through.

Henry C. Morrison, after serving for forty years on the African mission field, headed home by boat.

On that same boat also rode Theodore Roosevelt. Morrison was quite dejected when, on entering New York harbour, President Roosevelt received a great fanfare as he arrived home.

Morrison thought he should get some recognition for forty years in the Lord's service. Then a small voice came to Morrison and said, "Henry - you're not home yet."

This life as we know it will not last forever. We and this world will pass. And there is going to come a time when you and I, as followers of Jesus, will be going home, because we are not home yet.

Aren't you glad about that?

Hebrews 11:16 says what kind of home it is: "They were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. … God … has prepared a heavenly city for them."

It is talking here about the heroes of faith. One day, you and I will be fully alive in a heavenly homeland, in that heavenly city.

You see, it is great to be a Christian on this side of eternity. It is great to be a Christian now because you know that you have been forgiven. You do not have to live with regrets.

And you know that your life is significant. God has given your life meaning and purpose. And it is great to be a Christian because God is with you and He has adopted you and loves you.

But the final homecoming outweighs any earthly benefit. 1 Corinthians 15:19 says in the Message paraphrase: "If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot."

Jesus wasn't a merely good teacher who provided us with some inspiration on how to live life. He came to give us everlasting life forever. He came to bring us home. And when life gets tough, you and I need to remember that.

No matter how hard the slugging today, we're "just a-passing through".

The second insight to capture joy in tough times, is that God reassures us with a living hope.

Would you agree with me that on this side of eternity we all need massive doses of hope?

Imagine a suburb in town that was advised that all the houses would be bought up - expropriated - by the city to make way for a new highway. And the city decided to give the residents a year's notice so that they could cash out and find another house to make their home.

What do you think would happen to those yards? In many cases they would be neglected! Fences would not be repaired or repainted. Renovations that were long planned would be cancelled. Leaky roofs would be patched rather than replaced.

And of course the city would no longer be interested in the upkeep of the neighbourhood. Cracks in the footpaths would be left. Playgrounds would suffer neglect. And any shops would be long gone before the year was up.

And soon, long before the bulldozers came, the neighbourhood would look uncared for, shabby and even abandoned.

That's the cost of a lack of hope.

Peter says in verse 3 "God … has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

God's wants our life to be immersed in hope. Notice that word 'living'. The Christian hope is a living hope.

What is the opposite of a living hope? The opposite of a living hope is a dead, dying or false hope.

False hope is everywhere. Every time someone buys a lottery ticket, there is the false hope that they will win. And even if they do win, they cling to the false hope that it will provide them with that illusive happiness.

But every time we say, "I hope to see you soon" or when we make plans and we say, "This is what I plan to do tomorrow and next week," we are really not sure whether our plans will succeed because we do not control everything.

When I was a teenager in the Anglican Church the priest approached me and another young person to join with him as he set up the church hall as a youth drop-in centre with youth activities on a Sunday

afternoon.

He booked the hall and purchased a large amount of equipment — table tennis tables, card tables, dartboards, board games and all the paraphernalia that went with them and gave me a set of keys to the hall.

He then worked on an extensive advertising campaign within the church, the local schools and in the general community.

For a couple of months, every Sunday afternoon I would unlock the hall and turn on the hot water urn for refreshments.

Shortly thereafter the priest would join us in the hall, say a prayer with us and go out into the streets surrounding the church to round up young people to attend.

Faithfully the other young fellow and I would boringly fill the time playing table tennis or darts, activities that neither of us bookworms particularly enjoyed.

No one else ever came and eventually the idea was abandoned and the equipment donated to the church school.

Even our most hopeful plans are tentative.

But the living hope that a believer has is based not on wishful plans. The hope of which Peter speaks is anchored in an event in history. Your hope and my hope is based on Jesus' resurrection. That is why Peter calls it a living hope.

And since no one can undo history, no one can steal a living hope.

Our hope is anchored in the resurrection which is why one of the symbols of the Christian faith is the anchor.

The anchor symbolizes not wishful thinking, but a hope that is rooted, accomplished and guaranteed in history.

Truths that sustain us are that we are only passing through this life, and second, we are born into a resolute hope.

The third insight to capture joy in tough times, is that God redeems us for incorruptible glory.

Many people are pinning their hopes on an inheritance, maybe from a rich uncle or other family

member. Remember though, it is only cash and stuff.

It may be subject to be taxes. It will be spent — much of it on lawyers and accountants. Some of it will be fought over and divide families.

Much will be squandered. And even if the inheritance is invested in the world's most secure investments, these investments in the end won't last.

There is no guarantee that today's fortune will still be there tomorrow. And we know that well from the economic ups and downs our country has experienced this past year.

The things that are bought will rust through or wear out or burn up or waste away or be stolen or neglected or spoiled or get out of fashion or simply cast aside. Such is the nature of our perishable, temporary, throw-a-way world.

But notice verse 4, "God … has given us … an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you." Your inheritance in Christ is an incorruptible eternity that can never perish, spoil or fade.

Peter uses three descriptions of incorruptibility to make the point that what is in store for Christ

followers is absolutely secure.

Firstly, our inheritance won't be damaged - it says that it can "never perish."

Your inheritance as a child of God will never be threatened by hurricanes, cyclones, tsunamis, earthquakes, floods or terrorism.

It will never be broken into or stolen. No foreign army will come and blow it away or take possession of it. No lawyer can sue it away. It is fully secure.

Secondly, Peter says that our inheritance won't rot — it will "never spoil."

You will never be surprised when you go into the attic that there are structural problems that are going to add years to your mortgage payments.

In fact, you will never have a mortgage, because it is all paid for. And no mortgage can ever be taken out on it. You will be debt free, because Jesus has paid the price in full.

Thirdly he says that our inheritance won't wear out.

I remember one day when I was a child that a rag-and-bone man came to our door. A rag-and-bone man was a collector and recycler of worn-out rags and other discards.

He asked my dad, "What do you do with your trousers when you wear them out?". With a straight face my dad answered, "Why, when I wear my trousers out I wear them home again."

When Peter says that our inheritance won't wear out, he says that it can "never fade."

Do you remember from the Bible how in Exodus a remarkable thing happened? The shoes and the clothes of the Israelites never wore out during their 40 years in the wilderness.

God knew that during their journey through the desert people couldn't stop at the local K-Mart to pick up a new pair of trousers or a dress. So He made it so that the clothes they wore and the sandals on their feet did not wear out.

God so much cared for His people that He even preserved their clothes for the journey.

"Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither

did thy foot swell, these forty years" (Deuteronomy 8:4).

"And I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot" (Deuteronomy 29:5).

"Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not" (Nehemiah 9:21).

As God preserved even the clothes and sandals of His people, so your eternal inheritance will never wear out, never fade, never rust, never grow dull and never lose its shine.

And you might think, Well, doesn't that make heaven dull? You know, after a while ‘same old, same old’.

I am sure the Israelites were grateful that they didn't have to buy new clothes. But our heavenly inheritance is not like an earthly inheritance.

On earth you may inherit money or things. In heaven you inherit the completeness of an eternal love relationship.

A true love relationship is never dull. Think of your incorruptible, unspoiled inheritance as one long, enduring love relationship with God.

You will know Him like you never knew Him before, and you will know yourself like you never have known yourself before.

And you will not be afraid. Instead, you will be uninhibited in your love. It will be an everlasting spiritual celebration.

The fourth insight to capture joy in tough times, is that God refines us for genuine faith.

Notice the first part of verse 7, "These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold — and your faith is much more precious to God than gold."

Notice what Peter says: Trials create an occasion for us to reflect on how we can trust God more in it and through it.

God refines us. Why? So we can make a million dollars? No! So we can become famous and everybody admire us? No!

God allows trouble in our life to build authentic faith which God values more than our bank account, our fame or prestige, or even the contents of our triple garage.

You know, it is a general piece of human wisdom to realize that hardship either embitters you or helps you become a better person. The cliché touts that tough times make people either bitter or better.

In most instances in life, what is most important in life is not what trials we face, but how we face them. Will we become better or bitter? God has given us the ability to choose how to respond to tough times.

Robert Schuller has said that tough times don't last but tough people do.

We don't always follow God's will, but even when God's will is not done, we can respond according to God's will. That is why Jesus teaches us to pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Because God's will is often not done here on earth.

One writer phrased it this way, "God says that even though this is not a part of His original plan for this world, he can use our troubles to draw us closer to

Him. With His help we can still respond in a way that honours Him and His good, pleasing and perfect will, and He will draw us to Himself."

Notice the second part of verse 7 from the Message paraphrase: "When Jesus wraps this all up, it's your faith, not your gold, that God will have on display as evidence of His victory."

You see, all of us leave behind our things when we die. There is no forwarding address in heaven at which you can leave your inheritance. You leave it all behind.

You can rent a furniture removal trailer to move to any town in this country, but you cannot rent one to journey to heaven. I have never seen a furniture removal trailer being towed by a hearse.

What you will take along is your relationship with God, one that is founded on faith.

And God says, in effect, "During those tough times when you learned to trust me more; those events that were so difficult to endure, but to which you responded to by trusting me deeper, will be put on display. Our instances of faith are going to be showcased

and displayed as our life's greatest trophy."

And it keeps getting better. There is one more insight for tough times:

The fifth insight to capture joy in tough times, is that God replenishes us with inexpressible joy.

Verse 8: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The expression 'rejoice with joy' is made up of two different Greek words that both mean to ‘jump with joy’.

Joy is not something that is reserved for heaven. Jesus said, "... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

Joy is something that is available for today for all who have been born again into this living hope.

Peter was writing to those who were persecuted, whose jobs were on the line because they were believers, and some of whom were to be arrested and martyred, like Paul and later on Peter himself.

And Peter reminds them that even now we can be filled with a glorious, inexpressible joy.

Peter wasn't writing to spiritual giants. There were mature and immature believers among those to whom he was writing. And God does not expect us to have reached the stratosphere of spiritual maturity before we can be joyful in hard times.

All we need is Christ to have inexpressible joy.

All we need to know is Christ in our situation and we can be joyful with a glorious, inexpressible joy. I invite you to capture — to prehend — the joy of belonging to our faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.

Ron Mehl, in his book based on Psalm 121 and entitled, *God Works the Night Shift,* says, "You may be facing trials that do not resemble anything like 'pure joy' to you. In your own strength you may feel you cannot deal with them. Perfect! Lean on God. Remember that the One who watches over you will not slumber."

Mehl goes on to say, "I'm camping in my [Heavenly] Father's backyard. I've pitched my tent right beneath the window of heaven. I know He's watching me, because God works the night shift."

God is watching over you too.

"...Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

I express my thanks to the volunteers who edited and adapted these messages from audio recordings of a two-part impromptu public presentation.

— Lionel Hartley, 2005